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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended for use as reading material for the social studies unit, The Aleuts of the Eighteenth Century. Excerpts from journals of seven 18th-century explorers or travelers describe the inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands. The accounts have been translated from original notes kept by members of the Russian navy, ship commanders, a naturalist, a priest, and a British explorer. Based on their own experiences with the Aleuts or on reports from other explorers, the accounts are highly descriptive. They give details about the Aleuts' physical stature, clothes, jewelry, face adornment, food, hunting and fishing techniques, weapons, boats, houses, villages, family structure, child rearing, marriage customs, roles of chiefs and shamans, games, and festivals. (AV)

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AS THE EUROPEANS SAW THEM

Book II

of

The Aleuts of the Eighteenth Century
Social Studies Unit

SO 009 363

Compiled by
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SVEN WAXEL

1741

ABOUT SVEN WAXEL

Sven Waxel was a Swede who joined the Russian Navy in 1725. He was best known as the First Lieutenant on the ship the St. Peter, which sailed from Russia under the command of Vitus Bering. The ship sailed under orders of the czarina of Russia. Its mission was to discover what lay on the other side of the North-East ocean (today called the Bering Sea). Bering's ship sailed to Alaska in 1741 and although other Russian ships may have sailed within sight of Alaska first, Bering is given credit for having "discovered" Alaska.

The following quotation was taken from the account Waxel made of the St. Peter's voyage after he had returned to Europe, and is based on the journals he and other officers kept while on board.

CANOES of UNALASHKA.

From the Account by
Sven Waxel

September 5, 1741

"Only one person can sit in each kayak, which is sewn up tight both in front and behind. In the middle of the kayak is a raised part like a wooden bowl and in the center of this a hole large enough for a man to get the lower part of his body through it and down into the kayak.

Round this hole is fastened a sealskin bag which in its turn is fastened round the body with a long thong. Once seated in the kayak and thus fastened in it, not a drop of water can find its way inside. The natives are accustomed to these craft from youth and are perfectly able to maintain their balance - the whole secret of sailing them - even in very rough weather. Even when really high seas are running they are still able to sail from one island to the other, though the distance between them is mostly from four to five German miles.

"We noticed no bows and arrows or other weapons of the kind such peoples are wont to have with them. Only one of them had a knife at his side. This knife was made in a fashion quite unknown to us. It was about eight inches long and in front broad and thick. These

Americans' outer clothes or coats were made of whale guts cut up and sewn together again. Their trousers were of sealskin, while their caps were of sea-lion skin set around with various feathers, most of them, naturally, hawk's feathers. ...Their faces were red, but certain of them had painted theirs blue. Their individual features were like those of Europeans, in contrast to the Kalmuks who are all flat-nosed. They were long-limbed and well formed. Their food seemed to consist of all kinds of sea animals and of the blubber, a piece of which they had wished to give me. They also eat herbs of all sorts, and wild roots. While I was watching, they pulled up some roots, shook off the sand and gobbled them up. I should think that they must be just as good botanists as are the people of Kamchatka who also eat

many roots, yet never touch one which is poisonous, though there are various varieties that are in Kamchatka.

"More I was not able to find out about the Americans' way of life and manner of subsistence, being hindered in this by language difficulties, for I had no one with me who could talk with them."

GEORG STELLER

1741

ABOUT GEORG STELLER

Georg Steller was the naturalist assigned to Vitus Bering's ship the St. Peter. It was his job to record descriptions of the new land, including plants, animals, rock formations, and, of course, the people and their customs.

Though Steller was German, he joined the Russian army as staff sergeant in 1734 and remained in St. Petersburg (except for the scientific expedition in the east) for the rest of his life.

The quotation which follows was taken from Steller's journal of the voyage.

(The quotation from the Journal of Georg Steller (1741) is reprinted by permission of the American Geographical Society.)

From the Journal of
Georg Steller
September 5, 1741

"I must here mention a few circumstances which I observed in the course of the quarter of an hour we were at the shore. The American boats are about two fathoms long, two feet high, and two feet wide on the deck, pointed towards the nose but truncate and smooth in the rear. To judge by appearances, the frame is of sticks fastened together at both ends and spread apart by crosspieces inside. On the outside this frame is covered with skins, perhaps of seals, and colored a dark brown. With these skins the boat is [covered] flat above but sloping towards the keel on the sides; underneath there seems to be affixed a shoe or keel which at the bow is connected with the bow by a vertical piece of wood or bone representing a stem piece, so that the

upper surface rests on it. About two arshins* from the rear on top is a circular hole, around the whole of which is sewn [a strip made of] whale guts having a hollow hem with a leather string running through it, by means of which it may be tightened or loosened like a purse. When the American has sat down in his boat and stretched out his legs under the deck, he draws this hem together around his body and fastens it with a bowknot in order to prevent any water from getting in. Behind the paddler on the boat there lie ten or more red-painted sticks, pointed at one end, all made in the same way as the one we secured but for what purpose I cannot imagine, unless perhaps they serve to repair the boat in case the frame should break.

*Less than five feet (1 arshin = 28 inches)

The American puts his right hand into the hole of the boat, and holding the paddle in the other hand, carries it thus because of its lightness on to the land anywhere he wants to and back from the land into the water. The paddle consists of a stick a fathom long, at each end provided with a shovel, a hand wide. With this he beats alternately to the right and to the left into the water and thereby propels his boat with great adroitness even among large waves. On the whole, this kind of boat is very little different, if at all, from those used by the Samoyeds and by the Americans in New Denmark.*

"As far as the personal appearance of the islanders is concerned, of whom I counted on

*i.e., the Eskimos of Greenland

the beach nine, mostly young or middle-aged people, they are of medium stature, strong and stocky, yet fairly well proportioned, and with very fleshy arms and legs. . . . All had on whale-gut shirts with sleeves, very neatly sewed together, which reach to the calf of the leg. Some had the shirts tied below the navel with a string, but others wore them loose. Two of them had on boots and trousers which seemed to be made after the fashion of the Kamchadals out of seal leather and dyed brownish-red with alder bark. Two had hanging on their belt, like the Russian peasants, a long iron knife in a sheath of very poor workmanship, which may have been their own and not a foreign invention. Although I asked that one of these knives might be obtained in exchange by offering three or more of ours, of which our stores had

plenty, because it was very important and perhaps marks might be found on them from which it might be possible to conclude with what nation these islanders had communication, nevertheless this also was not done. From the distance I observed the nature of this knife very carefully as one of the Americans unsheathed it and cut a bladder in two with it. It was easy to see that it was of iron and, besides, that it was not like any European product. From this, then, might be concluded that the Americans not only have iron ore, of which thus far few or no traces at all have been discovered in Kamchatka, but that they also know how to smelt and work it."

ANDREI TOLSTYKH

1761-1764

ABOUT ANDREI TOLSTYKH

Andrei Tolstykh was the owner an commander of the ship Andreian i Natalia, which sailed for the Aleutians under orders from the czarina to explore and record information about the islands. Tolstykh was also to collect tribute (a certain percentage of the furs that were obtained during the year) from the Aleuts.

The quotation which follows is taken from Tolstykh's diary of his 1760-64 voyage to the Aleutian Islands.

From the Diary of
Andrei Tolstykh

1761 - 1764

"Among the islands is one with a burning mountain which shines brightly during the night and in the daytime spreads a dense smoke and heavy air. Burning sulphur is to be found on the mountain. The people come from the other islands in skin-boats and take the sulphur to make fires. Large springs of boiling water are found on many islands. In these springs the people bathe and also cook in plaited grass bags the meat of sea-animals, fish and edible roots, though generally they eat their food raw.

"The inhabitants of the islands are of middle stature or taller, their constitution is not like that of the Asiatic tribes, they are healthier and stronger than the Kamchadal, but resemble them by their faces, eyes and hair.

They have a rough appearance, but in conversation and dealings are courteous and agreeable, and clever and quick of comprehension.

"According to their customs, they cut holes in both sides of the upper lip, and one hole in the lower lip, above the beard. Into these holes they put pieces of walrus' tusk, having the form of a boar-pig's molar tooth, and in a perforation made in the nasal cartilage some people also wear bones of the thickness of a goose quill and about four inches long; this demonstrates the wealthiness of the clan and their mode of life and is worn by men as well as women. On the other hand, when the father, husband or another relative dies, the kinspeople never wear their bone ornaments, thus showing their affliction and mourning.

"Instead of caps, men wear on their heads

wooden hats of bent thin boards glued together with blood from their noses. The headwear is painted with local mineral paints, and looks like a hat with a brim extending over the eyes. Instead of earrings put into their ears the women wear eagles' and geese feathers behind the ears; on their necks they wear simple small rounded stones with painted seals' hair and the white hair of old people.

"The dress of the men and women consists of parkas made of skins of sea-birds, arries and sea-parrots which abound in these waters and have their nests among the rocks. Hunters catch the birds by means of nooses made of whalebone. Over the parkas of bird's skins they wear kamleis (water-proof shirts made of the bellies of sea-lions and seals) to protect them from dampness and rain when sea-hunting. In

the seams of these kamleis they sew painted seals' hairs for ornamentation. Men do not wear parkas made of sea-otters' skins, but the wives of prominent men wear such garments. They have no other clothing, either for winter or for summer.

"During the summer, by means of small bags made of whales sinew and tied together like drag-nets, they catch different kinds of edible fish which enter the rivulets from the sea. During the winter there are very few fish.

"For sea-going they make small baidarkas (skin-boats), the frames of which consist of hoops forming the ribs, covered with sea-lions' or seals'skins. In the middle of the boat is a rounded hatch, into which the hunter sits, stretching out his legs. Around the projecting rim of the hatch is fastened a shirt made of seal guts, the upper edge of which is tightly

drawn around the body under the arm-pits of the hunter, who rows with double paddles. In the summer they go to sea, sometimes sailing as far as two and a half versts (1.65 miles) from the shore, and catch halibut and cod, which are abundant; in winter they have to go as far as 20 versts (13.2 miles) or more from the shore. They catch the fish by hooks tied to lines about 150 fathoms long, made of sea-weeds, which are as thick as an ordinary iron wire and twice more enduring than a hemp cord.

"Fish caught in summer as well as in winter is eaten with great greediness, as has been said before, sometimes cooked, but more often raw, as is true with meat. Fish is dried in the sun for future use. When the catch of fish or mammals is unsuccessful, and particularly when the sea is stormy and they do not dare go out

in their skin-boats, they dig different kinds of edible roots for nourishment. In winter when the digging of roots is impossible and the stormy sea prevents hunting and supplies are wanting, they are threatened by famine. Then they go with their wives and children to the shore, gather seaweed and every kind of shells, and are glad when they find a stranded whale or some other sea-mammal. And under such poor conditions their lives are passed.

"They hunt sea-otters from skin-boats in the months of May and June in calm days. Perceiving in the sea a sleeping or a wakeful sea-otter they chase it, and nearing it at a distance of about 20 fathoms or more they throw long darts with boneheads, which they do with such precise aim that no animal or bird is able to escape.

"These people, not only in summer but also in winter, wear nothing more than the above-mentioned clothing made of bird skins and sea-mammals' guts. They know neither footwear, nor caps or mittens. They pass with bare feet over high rocky mountains, sometimes covered with snow, and when the feet or another part of the body are hurt or cut by a sharp rock, they hold the wound by the hand and another man sews it with a bone needle, threading the needle by a sinew, and so daringly performs the operation as if he were working on a piece of leather. The patient himself sits smiling and holds the wound by his hand, as if not feeling the pain, and thus demonstrates his strength and valor. When in winter the men go far out to sea to fish halibut and cod and come back to the shore extremely exhausted and senseless,

unable to walk, they take two small flint-stones, which they always have with them, and on stone put some hot sulphur and bird's down and on the ground they place dry grass. They strike one stone against the other, and soon sparks inflame the sulphur and down by which they then ignite the grass and put it into a stone lamp containing oil. The burning lamp is put under their parkas and they sit over it in a squatting position and thus warm their naked bodies.

"The Aleut heat their earth-huts in winter; in summer they burn in their lamps, only for light, oil which they store when they have killed sea-mammals. Each married man has in the earth-hut for himself and his family a dug-out hole in which is spread moss and grass. They lie down dressed in their parkas, with knees drawn up to their chins, and cover themselves with plaited grass-mats. Except as mentioned, they have neither clothing nor stored food. They

are generally carefree and live from hand to mouth, at least when the hunt is successful.

"They have neither guns nor bows. They have only long arrows or darts, 4 or 4 1/2 feet long, into the head of which a sharp stone or bone point with barbs is inserted. The darts are discharged from throwing boards in which there are slits for that purpose; the length of the slits is about 7 feet. With these weapons they kill men, beasts and birds as well as we do with guns.

"A man has two or three wives. A strong man may capture a woman of his liking from another man, on his own or another island, and may depose his former wife and keep her as a servant. These incidents create quarrels and wars among the islands, in which many are killed with the above-mentioned weapons and many carried away as prisoners and kept in slavery, thus provoking hostile feeling.

"We have little information about their amusements, but we know that they have single headed drums consisting of a wooden rim covered with a membrane of seal's skin held in place by cords. They hold the drum in the left hand by cross-cords inside of the instrument and beat it with a drum-stick held in the right hand. They chant songs and perform dramatic representations in which men and women dance, wearing many colored masks and decorating their heads all around with geese feathers like the tail of an Indian cock. Knowledge of the customs was learned through interpreters from the nearest islands to Kamchatka."

KRENITZIN & LEVASHEV

1768-1769

ABOUT KRENITZIN & LEVASHEV

Petr Kumich Krenitzin was commander of the ship the St. Gavril, and Mikhail Levashev the commander of the sister ship the St. Pavel. The two crafts sailed from Siberia on a scientific expedition to the Aleutians in 1768. They spent the winter anchored off Unalaska Island, suffering from bad weather and unfriendly relations with the Aleuts.

The quotation which follows is from the journal of that expedition.

From the Journal of
Krenitzin & Levashev

1768 - 1769

"The inhabitants of Alaxa, Umnak, Unalashka [sic] and the neighbouring islands, are of a middle stature, tawny brown colour, and black hair. In summer they wear coats (parki) made of bird skins, over which, in bad weather, and in their boats, they throw cloaks, called kamli, made

of thin whale guts. On their heads they wear wooden caps, ornamented with duck's feathers, and the ears of the sea-animal, called Scivutcha or sea-lion; they also adorn these caps with beads of different colours, and with little figures of bone or stone. In the partition of the nostrils they place a pin, about four inches long, made of bone, or of the stalk of a certain black plant; from the ends of this pin or bodkin they hang, in fine weather and on festivals, rows of beads, one below the other. They thrust beads, and bits of pebble cut like teeth, into holes made in the under-lips. They also wear strings of beads in their ears, with bits of amber, which the inhabitants of the other islands procure from Alaxa, in exchange for arrows and kamli.

"They cut their hair before just above the

eyes, and some shave the top of their heads like monks. Behind the hair is loose. The dress of the women scarcely differs from that of the men, excepting that it is made of fish-skins. They sew with bone needles, and thread made of fish guts, fastening their work to the ground before them with bodkins. They go with the head uncovered, and the hair cut like that of the men before, but tied up behind in a high knot. They paint their cheeks with strokes of blue and red, and wear nose-pins, beads, and ear-rings like the men; they hang beads round their neck, and checkered strings round their arms and legs. . . .

"The houses of these islanders are huts built precisely in the manner of those in Kamtchatka, with the entry through a hole in the middle of the roof. In one of these huts

live several families, to the amount of thirty or forty persons. They keep themselves warm by means of whale fat burnt in shells, which they place between their legs. The women sit apart from the men.

"Six or seven of these huts or yourts make a village, of which there are sixteen in Unalashka. The islands seem in general to be well inhabited, as may be conjectured from the great number of boats which are seen continually plying along the shore. There are upwards of a thousand inhabitants on Unalashka, and they say that it was formerly much more populous. They have suffered greatly by their disputes with the Russians, and by a famine in the year 1762; but most of all from a change in their way of life. . . . Their disposition engages them in continual wars, in which they always endeavour to gain

their point by stratagem. The inhabitants of Unimak are formidable to all the rest; they frequently invade the other islands, and carry off women, the chief object of their wars. Alaxa is most subject to these incursions, probably because it is more populous and extensive. They all agree in hating the Russians, whom they consider as general invaders, and therefore kill them where ever they can. The people of Unalashka however are more friendly; for Lieutenant Levasheff, being informed that there was a Russian vessel in the straits of Alaxa, prevailed on some Unalashkans to carry a letter, which they undertook, notwithstanding the danger they were exposed to from the inhabitants of the intervening islands.

"The journalist says, that these people have no kind of religion, nor any notion of a God.

We observe however among them sufficient marks of such a religion as might be expected from people in their situation. For the journalist informs us, that they have fortune-tellers employed by them at their festivals. These persons pretend to foretell events by the information of the Kugans or Daemons. In their divinations they put on wooden masks, made in the form in which they say the Kugan appeared to them; they then dance with violent motions, beating at the same time drums covered with fish skins. The inhabitants also wear little figures on their caps, and place others round their huts, to keep off the devils. . . .

"When a man dies in the hut belonging to his wife, she retires into a dark hole, where she remains forty days. The husband pays the same compliment to his favorite wife upon her death. . . .

"In each village there is a sort of chief called Tookoo: he decides differences by arbitration, and the neighbours enforce the sentence. When he goes out to sea he is exempt from working, and has a servant, called Kale, for the purpose of rowing the canoe; this is the only mark of his dignity: at all other times he labours like the rest. The office is not hereditary; but is generally conferred on him who is most remarkable for his personal qualities; or who possesses a great influence by the number of his friends. Hence it frequently happens, that the person who has the largest family is chosen.

"During their festivals, which are held after the fishing season ends in April, the men and women sing songs; the women dance sometimes singly, and sometimes in pairs, waving in their

hands blown bladders; they begin with gentle movements, which become at last extremely violent."

JAMES COOK

1778

ABOUT JAMES COOK

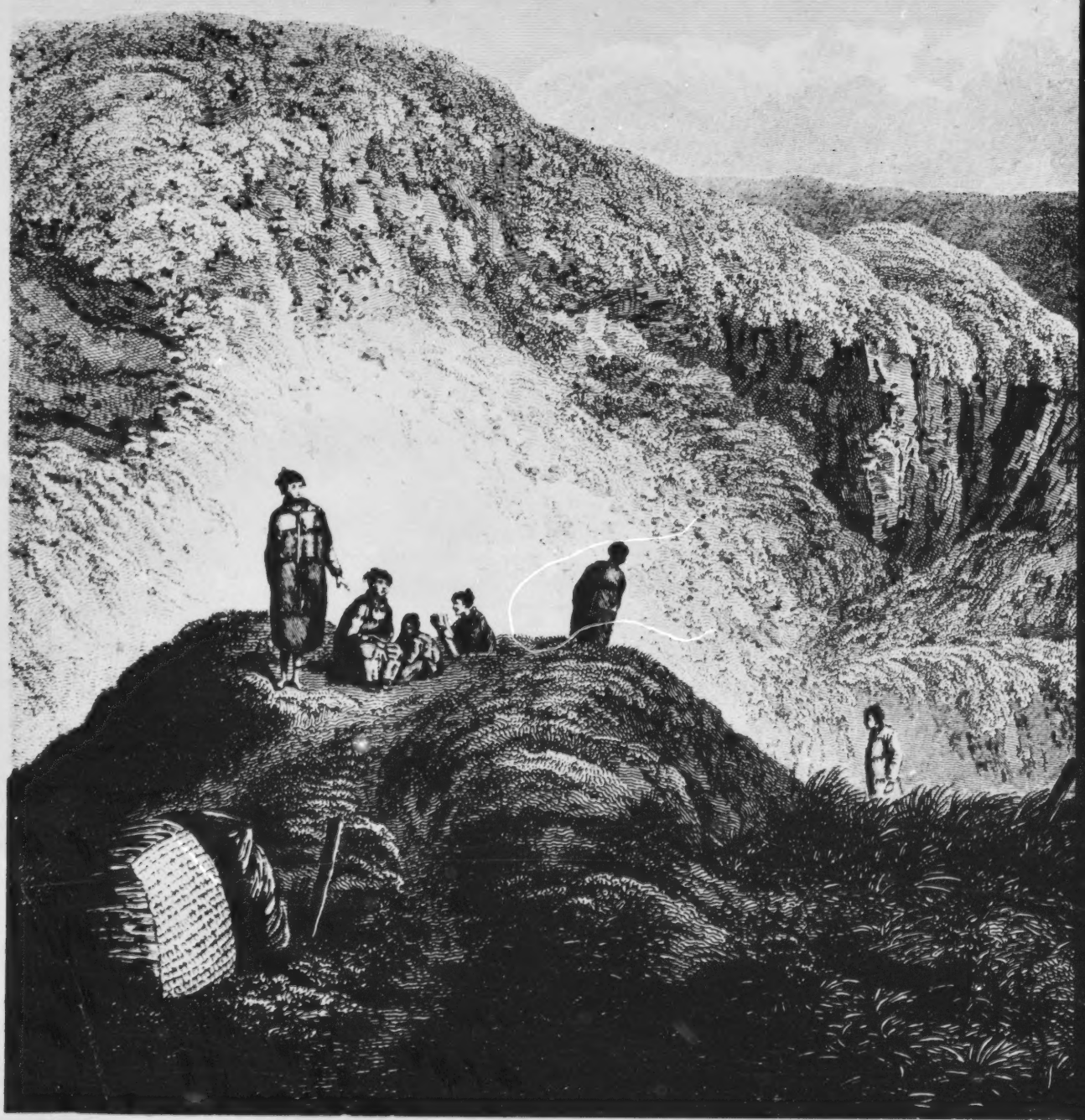
Captain James Cook was a British explorer who "discovered" many places which had never before been visted by Europeans. His third voyage of exploration took him to the Bering Sea, and he spent twenty-three days in English Bay on Unalaska Island during October, 1778.

The quotation which follows is from Cook's journal of the voyage.

From the Journal of
Captain James Cook

1778

"Their method of building is as follows: They dig, in the ground, an oblong square pit, the length of which seldom exceeds fifty feet, and the breadth twenty; but in general the dimensions are smaller. Over this excavation they form the roof of wood which the sea throws ashore. This roof is covered first with grass, and then with earth; so that the outward appearance is like a dunghill. In the middle of the roof, toward each end, is left a square opening, by which the light is admitted; one of these openings being for this purpose only, and the other being also used to go in and out by, with the help of a ladder, or rather a post, with steps cut in it. In some houses



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. NATIVES OF OONALASHK

J.Hall & C.Muddiman sc.

and their HABITATIONS.

there is another entrance below; but this is not common. Round the sides and ends of the huts, the families (for several are lodged together) have their separate apartments, where they sleep, and sit at work; not upon benches, but in a kind of concave trench, which is dug all round the inside of the house, and covered with mats; so that this part is kept tolerably decent. But the middle of the house, which is common to all the families, is far otherwise. For, although it be covered with dry grass, it is a receptacle for dirt of every kind, and the place for the urine trough; the stench of which is not mended by raw hides, or leather being almost continually steeped in it. Behind and over the trench, are placed the few effects they are possessed of; such as their clothing, mats, and skins.

"I saw not a fire-place in any one of their houses. They are lighted, as well as heated, by lamps; which are simple, and yet answer the purpose very well."

GAVRIL SARYCHEV

1791-1792

ABOUT GAVRIL SARYCHEV

Gavril Sarychev was the commander of the ship Slava Rossii, one of two ships in a scientific expedition sent out by the czarina of Russia. Sarychev spent the winter of 1791-92 on Unalaska Island, during which he traveled around the island to various Aleut villages.

The quotation which follows is from Sarychev's journal of his trip around the island.

From the Journal of
Gavril Sarychev

1791 - 1792

"Illuluk lies on the eastern part of Captain's-bay, at the mouth of a brook. It contains four large jurts, or huts, constructed of mud, and logs of wood, which are driven hither by the currents of the sea. They are covered with grass and mud, and instead of a door have an opening, which is too low to enter without stooping. From this opening you ascend by a beam, that serves for stairs, into the interior of the hut; where, close by the wall, divisions are set apart for each family, and the floors are covered with rush-mats, which serve for beds. Every female occupies a distinct division, and is mostly busied in making mats, sacks, or baskets, which task she executes with amazing dexterity.

These baskets, &c. are made of the longest blades of grass previously dried, and for the finer works, split into slips. In this process, she uses no other instrument but her fingers: with the nail of her fore-finger, which she suffers to grow to a great length, until it is as sharp as a lancet, she not only parts the blades of grass, but also the sinews of animals, which she twists with her fingers alone into a beautifully fine and even thread for sewing their clothes. Their needles they make of the bones of fish, large or small as the work requires, and fasten their thread to them by tying. Whenever they get a steel needle, they immediately break off the eye, and rub it on the edge of a stone, till they have made a notch, where they can tie the thread in their usual way. . . .

"In the beginning of October, the Subaltern Chudakow was sent out to survey the Aleutian Islands, upon which the Aleutians also set off from the Andrejenow Islands for Umnak, where they intended wintering.

"At the close of this month the Aleutians began the sea-bear* chace [sic], which continued till November. These animals return from the northern to the southern countries, and in their course enter the bays of this island; upon which the Aleutians pursue them in their baidars. They know pretty accurately the spot where they rise up out of the water, and two or three men to a bear plant themselves in a convenient position for casting their darts at him, as soon as he makes his appearance. Thus by repeated wounds with their darts every time he rises, they at length completely exhaust and cripple him; but that he

*fur seal

may not sink immediately on receiving the mortal stab, they affix bladders to their darts. He only has a right to the skin of the animal who inflicts the first wound.

"The chace of otters and other aquatic animals is subject to similar laws. The first successful darter receives half the skin and entrails, and has besides the right of assigning the other half to any one of the hunters he pleases; the second successful aim entitles the person to the neck, and the remaining entrails; the third takes the bladder; the fourth and fifth can claim the fore feet; the fifth and sixth the hind feet. The flesh is shared equally among all the parties concerned.

"At the commencement of the year's chace, the person to whose share the first sea-lion

falls, distributes his portion of flesh among all the Aleutians of his place; but they are obliged to return him all the bones, which being collected together, are thrown back into the sea.

"The commencement of the sea-lion-chace terminates the fishery, the weather being usually too cold, and the winds too vehement. The favourite food of the Aleutine is the flesh of sea-animals, which, when consumed, is supplied by shell-fish, roots, and sea-wort; some of them indeed, in summer, lay bye [sic] dry fish, roots, and fat, which is, however, generally in too small quantities to last any length of time. The sea, therefore, remains, at all times, their grand resource; one while supplying them with an abundance of fish or animals for their pursuit, and another time casting on its shore many

delicacies which require no labour to obtain. In this manner the inhabitants pass an easy life heedless of futurity. . . .

"During a stay of three days, [at the village of Makuschinsk] I found the games here which are usual among these people, and which continue through the winter until the beginning of spring, or until the appearance of the whales. Their origin is ascribed to the Shamans, who assure them that the spirits are pleased with such performances, and will, in return, send plenty of whales on shore. The performers wear masks, resembling the faces of the spirits which have appeared to the Shamans; and, although these men no longer possess the implicit confidence of the people, the Aleutians always celebrate the arrival of a fish with these games. The person first

making the discovery announces it by wearing a narrow fillet on his head, and has a right to half the entrails, skin, tongue, and sinews. The rest is divided by the trojars of the village among the other Aleutians.

"On one of the days which I passed here I witnessed the following celebration of the above-mentioned games: - There poles were placed horizontally between the beams of the jurt, the first about three feet below the upper opening of the jurt, the second about twelve feet lower, and the third about nine feet below the second, and about four feet from the ground.

"The Aleutians assembled from the different villages then swing themselves up to the opening, during which a perpetual clamour is kept up by the shouts of the people at whose jurt it takes place, while those who miss their aim and fall

to the ground are saluted by the spectators with loud peals of laughter. As soon as this is concluded, and the guests are seated, the dances commence in the following order: - First, two boys in a state of nudity, who were followed by men with drums fancifully decorated with caps on their heads, girdles round their loins, and bands on their arms and feet; afterwards females, two and two, having their heads encircled with binders embroidered with goat's hair, flourishing bladders of birds' skins, and dancing to the drums; then a second string of females carrying arrows; and finally a train of men in motley masks, with wide streaked mouths, and on their heads a sea-dog's face. Some few who were seated struck violently on drums, to which they sung the following verses, which, although translated to me, I by no means understood:

What shall I do?
As it appears to me,
That I shall do.

"Then came another mask, with wide extended mouth, and a shepherd's crook, singing as follows:

O what knavery!
O what roguery!
Thou, O Ammech!
Hast made the world.

"A third mask, having lost a left eye, sung the following:

In the midst of Alaska,
Is Agmagaluk's jurt;
'Tis that which we sing.

"These men were followed by female masks, who seated themselves by the man with the sea-dog's face, before whom a few other women danced with dishevelled hair, carrying beards of sea-lions in their hands, occasionally pointing to the mask seated in the middle. They sung

the following verse:

> The hellish island Sakehadok
> Contains the arrows we must not forget;
> Yet why should we remember
> That which brings no good?

"And thus ended the piece. . . .

"Among the Aleutians who accompanied me from Akmagan [to Koshiga] was a Shaman, who undertook the restoration of a sick woman at the request of her relations. The Shaman and some of his country people seated themselves in a circle round the sick woman, and commenced a Shaman's hymn, accompanied by the drum; to this, after a short time, followed a profound silence, occasioned, as the interpreter informed me, by the appearance of a spirit, which the Shaman began to supplicate for the sick woman. The spirit appeared rather

obstinate at first; but at the continued entreaties of the Shaman at length yielded, adding, that the sick person suffered on account of her father's having, while on the whale fishery, smeared his arrows with the spinal marrow of that fish, and since he was now dead, an evil spirit was charged to obtain satisfaction from the daughter. The song now recommenced, and at the expiration of five minutes silence again prevailed. The Shaman then addressed the spirit, which now appeared to be under his control, and informed the bystanders, that it was now in the bowels of the sick woman, for the purpose of minutely examining the disease, and removing the cause, from which in three days her restoration might be expected. This hope, according to the assurance of the Shaman, was confirmed by

another spirit, whose opinion he had obtained; and thus concluded the exorcism. The Shamans never demand any compensation from the people, contentedly receiving what is given them, and never requiring offerings for the spirits. . . .

"Towards evening, I suddenly heard the drum beating in a corner of the Jurt, and was informed by my interpreter, that the Tojas and Shamans were conjuring a spirit for favourable weather. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour the Shaman began to cry aloud, but soon ceased, and fell senseless to the ground. The terror became universal, a crowd surrounded him; sung a solemn lamentation, and conjured the spirit to spare the good Shaman; notwithstanding which he continued some time motionless, but at last revived, and informed the bystanders 'that he had summoned the spirit into his

presence, and commanded him to send fine weather; but the spirit thought it by no means necessary, and he accordingly reproved him for his obstinacy and caprice, threatening, if he persisted in his refusal, to inform the people that he had not sufficient power, which would certainly not be much to his honour. Upon this the spirit became so furious, that he fell on him, and continued to torment him until he became senseless, during which period it was manifested to him, that the weather would be no better until three days after the death of a certain woman, (whose name he mentioned), which would take place in the course of the summer. Then (added he) we might sail as far as Makuschinsk, but no farther, as we should there be again overtaken by bad weather. He enjoined us therefore, by no means to attempt proceeding farther, even if advised

to do so by the inhabitants themselves. He then informed me that on my return to my vessel, I should not find my companions and people in a good state; but that although we might lament having passed the whole winter on the island, yet we should put to sea at the commencement of the summer, and happily return to the place from which we came.'. . .

"The weapons of the islanders consist merely of darts and spears, which, as they use them for different purposes, are of various sizes. The first sort, which are used against men and animals, are four foot long, having a bit of lava affixed as a point, which is an inch and half long, and three quarters of an inch broad. The second sort is smaller than the first, and is only used against animals; points of bone instead of lava are tied on them

with sinews. The third sort, which is used for killing birds, is equal to the first in size, and provided with four barbed bone-points. The fourth sort is nine feet long, and also used against animals, having at one extremity a bony point, to which is tied a thong made of sinews, that is wound twice round the middle of the spear. The other extremity is adorned with a bush of eagle's feathers. The fifth sort is four feet four inces long, having a bony point, and in the middle an inflated bladder, to keep the mortally wounded animal from sinking. The boards with which these darts were thrown are about a foot and half long; one end is fitted for a handle, and at the other end a bone is fastened in like a nail, on which the dart is placed for being thrown.

"The darts and boards are dyed with a red

stuff, collected from the sides of the rocks, and dissolved in water secreted from blood, by which it is made proof against rain or salt-water.

"The blood for this purpose they get from their noses, which they prickle with a blade of grass, until they have procured a sufficiency. On any excursion to sea, they fix their darts behind and before them, in thongs fastened to the baidar.

"The darts, which the Aleutian always endeavours to get again, he throws with his right-hand, while with his left he manages the baidar.

"He is so dexterous in the government of his bark, that the lightest sloop would certainly not be able to overtake him; for we had the experience of the Aleutians coming

up with our vessel in their baidars, when it was going at the rate of four leagues an hour."

IVAN VENIAMINOV

1823-1834

ABOUT IVAN VENIAMINOV

Father Ivan Veniaminov was a Russian Orthodox priest assigned to the Unalaska District from 1823 to 1834. While there, he learned the Aleut language and developed a writing system for the language. He also traveled to many of the islands, learning some of the old customs from the people as he traveled.

The following quotation is taken from his Zapiski, or Notes which he wrote after leaving Unalaska. Veniaminov's information is based on what he was told by the Aleuts as well as what he observed himself. Many of the customs reported to him were no longer practiced in the 1800's. The Aleut elders who recounted them to Veniaminov were describing them from memory.

From the Notes of
Ivan Veniaminov
1823-1834

"The training of children of both sexes was the obligation of their uncle on the maternal side, who was obliged to instruct his nephews and nieces from earliest childhood up to full adulthood, preparing them in every way for their future mode of life. Therefore each father without fail gave his son up to his brother-in-law, his wife's brother. In the event that no uncle was to be had, the obligation of training reposed on the father himself. The training of girls was intrusted to the mother and grandmothers under the supervision of the uncle.

"At the present time uncles have almost completely ceased to assume this obligation of training, but leave it to the godfather or the parents themselves.

"The training of youngsters consisted in making them capable of enduring all. They, like the Koloshi today,* had the custom of bathing their children in cold water or in the sea at any season of the year in order to harden their body. Then they taught them to ride the baidarka, how to be skillful in unmooring and mooring the baidarka, and how to manage it in a strong surf. They taught them how to save themselves and others in perilous situations and especially now to be skillful in hunting and in war. Household chores in general were almost totally excluded from their curriculum. Save for the building of the home and the making of the domestic utensils it was limited to the laying in of fish or hunting of

*the Tlingit Indians

animals for food, but no more. All the rest was considered outside the province of a man. They considered it unnecessary and improper to teach a youngster the details of housekeeping. He was designed for another profession--the profession of glory.

"The training of girls, in addition to moral instruction, consisted in teaching them to sew every kind of clothes, to embroider designs with wool and hair, to plait carpets and baskets, to clean fish and prepare all the game brought in by their husbands, to gather roots and other collected products. To maintain cleanliness and to keep the house in order, however, was considered the work of slaves.[1]

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[1]Physical punishment with birch rods did not exist among them at all. Therefore, it is extremely likely that the punishment of the youngsters of hostages by the first Russians hastened the death of the latter and was one of the impelling reasons for the attack on our people.

"In general, the parents did not dream of teaching their children industry and housekeeping, saying that their children were not of the race of slaves. . . .

"At exactly what age they formerly entered upon marriage is not known for sure. One can only say the men were never permitted to marry before they grew a beard, because, as they said, he who marries in youth soon forgets his parents and replaces them with wife and children, that is, he will feel concern only for them. Therefore they did not allow early marriages in order that the children might be as useful as possible to their parents and kinsmen. As for girls, they might not marry until they were consummate housewives.

"The bridegroom and bride, no matter what be their wishes in the matter, could not marry without the general consent of their kinfolk, and especially their parents and uncles. The man who violated this custom incurred the prolonged resentment of his kinsmen. But it often happened that parents, without asking the bridegroom whom he wanted to marry and without even the knowledge of the bride, arranged their betrothal. Only when their marriage was settled upon did they break the news to their children and consult their wishes in the matter. The bridegroom almost never dared to oppose, but the wishes of the bride were very often respected because the choice of a bridegroom almost always was left to her. From earliest childhood she was impressed with the idea that she must not marry an unworthy Aleut and thereby

shame herself and her kinsmen. The parents and kinsmen of the bridegroom displayed much concern over the choice of a bride. They sought to select a worthy maiden and to discern her qualities as well as they could. Hence not infrequently the match was called off even after the betrothal.

"When the proposed marriage had obtained the approval of all, the bridegroom had to spend the next year or two in hunting for the kinsmen of the bride. If the bride was from another settlement he moved thither in order to display his prowess personally. But, if for one reason or another he could not or did not wish to work for his bride, then he had to make rich presents to the parents and kinsmen of the bride. After he has performed the one or other, the bride was given up to the full control of the bride-

groom, but without any presents in return and without any ceremonies (except for a feast and an entertainment). After that he could either take his wife to his home or if his wife was so inclined, he could even settle down for good in that village. . . .

"Polygamy was not forbidden. But since the acquisition of a bride cost very dear, many had only one or two and very few had more than six wives. . . .

"Women were permitted to have two husbands, one of whom was the chief one while the other was his assistant or, as the Russians call it, his 'double'. To such a woman no depravity was imputed, but on the contrary she was credited with being clever and efficient because she was obliged to sew for both men. She had to keep all their kamleiki and canoe coverings in

repair etc. --tasks which are ordinarily intrusted to the care of the wife. The second husband fully enjoyed the rights of a husband and like the first husband, he had to hunt and in general to work for the support of wife and family; but he was not completely master of the household. . . .

"The entertainments or festivals of the ancient Aleuts were twofold: some formal and general and others private and informal.

"The formal festivals consisted of scenic stage representations. These were always held in the winter and alternated between one settlement and another. They were organized by the entire population and for them each and every inhabitant gave almost all that he had -- particularly in the way of food supplies. Thus after each festival everyone of them inevitably

went hungry in the full sense of the word. Such a famine was not considered a shameful thing but one of glory. Each settlement, in its turn, sought to outdo each other in the invention of scenes, in the artistry of staging, and in the profusion of their hospitality.

"The plays or representations of one settlement did not resemble those of another. The preparations began very early according to their intricacy. These plays were called oukamak, representations, and in them there were never any shamanist performances, but they specifically acted out with personages some historical occurrence from their past--such as a battle with foes or with beasts, an attack upon the former or the latter, or the making of peace, etc. Not infrequently their poets composed their own plays. It is noteworthy

that at every performance there were on the stage two personages or rather two dummies of extraordinary size. These were made of grass and were clothed in the finest garments, and the play was acted in the space between these two figures. One of these personages, called Igadagakh, bug-bear, represented a giant with a fear inspiring countenance and a long beard. The other, called Kougalitálik (something like 'devilishness' from the word Kougak, 'devil') was even larger than the other and also had a frightful visage. The actors performing on the stage as well as the dancers always displayed respect and reverence for these figures. What did these two personages signify? What was their origin? No one can tell.

"The play was always given in a public barabora or kazhim where the front part was

hung with grass mats and from which the actors and dancers walked upon the stage with and without masks.

"After preparations for the festival had been completed, 'inviting' baidarki were sent to the various settlements to summon the guests. The invitations were not made on an individual basis, but anyone who wished could come. The guests were not to come singly or at different times, but together and at one time and not by night but during the day. Therefore, the meeting and escorting of the guests always had a solemn character.

"As soon as the people of the settlement sighted the arriving guests, they immediately went out to the shore and divided into two groups to await the landing of the guests. One group always consisted of the young men and

women who were to greet and receive the guests, while the other, consisting of all the other inhabitants, during this time composed a choir of musicians and singers. As soon as the guests began to land on the shore, the choir began its performance, that is, they beat on tambourines as loudly as possible and sang songs specially composed for the occasion. They continued the music and singing until all the guests had landed on the shore and had been lodged in huts specially prepared for them right on the shore. Then the elder of the settlement, i.e. the chief, or, in his absence, some respected inhabitant made a speech of greeting to the guests, in which, lauding the guests and his own people, he sought to indicate their friendship and zeal and to point out that the festival itself had been arranged by them to give

satisfaction and to entertain their guests, etc. This terminated the ceremony of greeting. Then followed entertainment in the huts. To each hut in which guests were lodged they assigned several young men as servants.

"On the same or following day, the chief sent his son or nephew to the guests to request their presence in the public barabora. At this time the ladder which ordinarily stood at the entrance to the barabora (which was always on the top) was completely removed. In its place (for greater merriment and in order to discern the agility of the guests), they placed a ladder made of inflated bladders and animal effigies, also inflated, placed one on top of another and joined together somehow. On the ends of the bladders and effigies they fastened fine little sticks to which they tied several small bladders, like-

wise inflated and filled with various rattles. Down such a 'funny' ladder only the most agile individual could descend without falling.

"The guests attired in their finest costumes went with the messenger who went in front and showed them the way. Coming to the newly constructed ladder, he clambered down into the barabora. The guests had to descend after him one by one. As soon as the first guest stepped on the first rung or the first bladder several of the men began to beat on tambourines adding to the confusion of the trembling guest as he descended the playful ladder. All the other men and women struck up ceremonial songs in praise and honor of the guests, (and sometimes in mockery, if they did not descend the ladder with agility).

"When all the guests have descended--or fallen--into the barabora, they seat them at prepared places and begin to regale them. After the feasting began the plays and dances in which the guests never took part but were only spectators.

"In the middle of the performances or more frequently earlier, some of the respected inhabitants of the village, beginning with the chief, walked out on the stage without masks, but in their clan and of course finest costume from which hung the trophies of their forebears: hair, teeth, weapons, garments, implements, etc. which had been taken from enemies, or bones of various animals and pieces of skins and various other objects memorable in some way. They did not walk out to dance, but to display or testify to the exploits of their clan. All the others who

appeared on the stage wore different masks and represented in their persons all that they could think of: battle, victory, peace, the catching of animals, etc. They held in their hands weapons or any other object suited to the representation.

"Some of the daring and agile individuals, acting out a battle, sought to make it appear as authentic as possible, and for this purpose they provided themselves with small bladders filled with seal's blood, artfully tieing them under their parki in a place known to each other. During the battle they stabbed in that place and the blood flowed in the sight of the spectators. In warlike scenes, two personages, giants who never left the stage, represented the leaders.

"During the entire time of the performances

the playing of tambourines and the songs never ceased only changing according to the nature of the play.

"These performances continued for several days, and in general until all the plays or scenes that they had prepared were exhausted.

"On the conclusion of each performance as before it began, there customarily followed a feast. Finally, to wind up the proceedings, they presented the guests with their productions. In general all sought to feast the guests as amply as possible and give them presents as liberally as possible.

"The escort of the departing guests was marked by the same ceremony as the greeting. If the hosts were certain that their guests were satisfied with their entertainment and especially with the artistry of the performances, this was

their greatest reward and glory notwithstanding the fact that they themselves were impoverished after it was all over. Hungry but glorious! It is evident that they put glory above all.

"The informal or plain festivals, called Kaganasik "merrymaking", could take place at any time when guests had arrived unexpectedly. They consisted solely in the alternate singing of songs and dancing by the hosts and the guests and that was all. Here the guests were met without any ceremony and were received into the barabora without the 'show' ladder. When the guests had assembled, they sat them all together on one side of the barabora, while the hosts--the men--sat on the other side opposite the guests at a distance of about three sazhen. Thus there was formed an almost square space where

those who wished could dance, while the women and children stationed themselves around the sides of the barabora.

"When the hosts and guests had sat down, some small boys brought tambourines and batons with which to beat them and placed them on the floor before the hosts. The hosts immediately selected tambourines and began to sing, singing as expressively--that is, as loudly--as possible, to the beat of the drum. Having concluded one song they sang a second and a third. Upon the conclusion of the third song, the hosts passed the tambourines to the guests through the agency of the same small boys who carried and laid them before the guests without saying a word. Then the guests took up the tambourines and began their songs. After the second song, they sent the tambourines back to the hosts who

during the singing, sit and listen with attention to the songs of the guests just as the latter listen to the songs of their hosts. After singing two songs, the hosts again sent tambourines to the guests and thus on it went.

"Here the chief interest consists in having the songs as well-made as possible, new and not heard before by the competitors. For this reason one and the same song is not repeated in one evening, but each time new songs are sung.

"During the singing anyone who wished could walk out and dance, squatting and bounding up to the beat of the tambourines without any order of succession or any order at all. But the dancer, male or female, could only perform if attired in a parka and one of very fine appearance. Therefore one parka was used to cover several shoulders. In this dance both hosts and guests

could take part and the singers and the musicians themselves also danced alternatively. . . .

"Their national game is the one they call kakan, in which ordinarily two pairs of contestants play. They play partners and stand opposite each other with one member of each team on a side.

"They make two small fields or squares on the floor at a short distance from each other and draw across it a number of lines (three, it seems); each farther away than the other. Alternatively and more frequently, they place grass mattings marked with stripes on the floor instead of squares. Then the contestants each take several small wooden or bone discs, a little more than a copper ten copeck coin in size. Getting down on his knees on one matting, one of the players throws a disc on the other matting,

striving to place it on some line or stripe. His opponent who is at his side tries to knock it off with his disc, or if his rival has failed, he tries to place his disc on a line. When each contestant, in turn, has thrown all his discs, then the one who has placed the greatest number of discs on lines or who has even thrown only one as long as it is more than his opponent, obtains a certain number of little sticks (similar to fishes or chips used in Boston). Then the other team takes these same discs and begins to throw them in the same manner. When all of a given number of little sticks have passed to any one side three times, then that side has won. However, the game can last a long time since these little sticks pass from hand to hand many times before they are all in the possession of one pair of contestants."